

With All Your Heart  
Making A New Thing  
Isaiah 43:16-21  
Fifth Sunday of Lent 2019  
April 7, 2019  
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Isaiah 43:16-21 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD,  
    who makes a way in the sea,  
    a path in the mighty waters,  
<sup>17</sup> who brings out chariot and horse,  
    army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise,  
    they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former things,  
    or consider the things of old.  
<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing;  
    now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
    and rivers in the desert.  
<sup>20</sup> The wild animals will honor me,  
    the jackals and the ostriches;  
for I give water in the wilderness,  
    rivers in the desert,  
to give drink to my chosen people,  
<sup>21</sup>     the people whom I formed for myself  
so that they might declare my praise.

In a book called Outliers, a psychologist wrote that “anyone can master anything, given 10,000 hours of deliberate practice. That’s almost 14 months!

I’m guessing that *doesn’t mean* a few hours a day of half-hearted plunking on a piano hoping to become a concert pianist.

Or playing around on the monkey bars and thinking we can get to the Olympics as a gymnast.

We’re talking the kind of practice for something that you would feel incomplete without.

That many hours is about persistent, intentional effort, until mastery becomes more like muscle memory (and boy, they've been talking about muscle memory in the NCAA tournament – especially when someone is on the free throw line!)

That dedication is doing that one thing that you've worked so long and hard to master that it feels like “coming home.”

For us, the people of God, our one thing THAT WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DEDICATED TO LIKE A CONCERT PIANIST, AN OLYMPIAN OR FINAL FOUR BASKETBALL PLAYER, is **resurrection**; that movement from death to new life.

We practice resurrection as a Family of Faith and as individuals all the time, or at least we should.

- Every time we gather somewhere where we can make a confession (as we did earlier in this worship service,) we practice resurrection. We unburden our lives and our hearts from the weight of sin that we've carried too long.
- And when we come to this Table, in just a few minutes, we practice the movement of “being dead” and move toward new life. We come hungering for the nourishment of God's grace and we receive bread that sustains our bodies (and our souls) and we leave the Table, full of community, hope, and memory.
- Every time we lift our prayers for someone, we trust that our prayers rise to God who hears every need, we step out of the “grave” into a new reality.
- Every time a child of God comes to the waters of baptism and we recommit ourselves to be drenched in the same Spirit that hovered over the waters at “in the beginning,” we walk into newness of life.

It is deliberate.

And we have to practice these things until something that is NOT common-sensical - RESURRECTION - seems like the most natural thing in the world to us; that we've “come home.”

So, don't be “stuck” in what seems a long season of Lent, 'cause Dear Ones, we still practice resurrection.

It is still our thing.

It is still our home.

We still pray and confess and come to Christ's supper Table.  
We still affirm, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

And, if we've really immersed ourselves in this Lenten season, we will find our hearts transformed on Easter morning.

But make NO MISTAKE, it takes deliberate practice to "make a new thing."

We've starting that final push toward the empty tomb, but there is still some practicing that we have to do before the stone can be rolled away.

Today's reading, some of the poetry of Isaiah that includes what our kiddos memorized last summer at VBS. Those of you blessed to have a pillow that they made, in your pew, can review IS 43:2: *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."*

That verse is one of Gretchen's favorite by the way.

As John read, (further into chapter 43) you might have felt like "hey, we've been here before" because the theme from Isaiah is almost identical to Paul's writing in Corinthians that we read LAST Sunday.

Your OT teaching today is that this section of Scripture is often called "Second Isaiah" – the chapters 40-55 – and they are a capsule of the exile experience. These 15 chapters are written as a reminder that God is still practicing resurrection even when (**especially** when) life is at its darkest and hope seems lost.

Isaiah's writing is a reminder that when the people of Israel were tempted to go back into slavery, back to Egypt 'cause *"the wilderness is just too hard"* God made a way from **that** death into new promise.

And hear this Dear Ones: GOD WILL DO THAT AGAIN AND AGAIN. God is STILL doing that!

Did you hear John read “Do not remember the former things”(v.18) and think to yourself, “well, THAT’S strange, don’t remember the former things?”

Too often we see when we’re in the OT, that every time the Israelites forgot their history, bad things happened to them.

When they didn’t stay rooted in memory, they easily fell astray and neglect all the things that made them God’s people in the first place.

Isaiah, telling them to “forget former things,” is talking about past trauma and hurts that tended to keep the people of God wrapped up in “grave clothes” rather than focusing on memories that moved them forward with hope.

All of us experiences times that aren’t pleasant and we seem to hold onto them: grief, shame, disappointment, anger, depression, and addiction – all things that can keep us from practicing resurrection.

What’s holding us; holding you AND me, in the “wildernesses?”

What’s keeping US wrapped in shadows that make us forget that resurrection is possible and natural for the people who claim the name of Christian?

It’s in times like these that we need to practice our muscle memory (like pianists and Olympians) and walk from death into new life.

It’s crucial.

There’s so much that can hold us in death.

**BUT THERE IS one thing** that can compel us to be open to new life.

Are our eyes open to see that **one thing**?

Perhaps , we’ve got to LET GO of all the stuff (you insert the label of your life’s baggage here) ...we’ve got to let go of everything that holds us back and see NEW life springing up.

In Isaiah, God promises that the new thing that is springing up will make gardens out of deserted places... and even the weirdest looking animals (platypuses and ostriches) will honor God by practicing resurrection.

NEW LIFE is about transformation.

God is promising rivers!  
And rivers won't run through deserts without changing them.  
And God's love can't flow through our hearts without transforming us.

We add to our "muscle memory" of resurrection when we're reminded by Isaiah's words, that God has made us for this exact purpose.

To be transformed.

To be resurrected.

We can't praise the risen Christ, let alone rise ourselves, if we are still stuck in the old, former things.

What's next?

We're on the way to Jerusalem people!

And the cross awaits Jesus there in a story of betrayal, crucifixion, and death that leaves us in stunned silence

But, in the midst of that, we've GOT TO remember to practice resurrection.

The world, everybody "**out there,**" – they've heard the sad story; they know it too well.

The world also knows, too well, the pain of death, innocence lost and injustice upon the last, lost, and least.

We, Dear Ones, have got to practice resurrection and be witnesses that there is a "what comes next" part of the story.

We can testify that the death of Jesus Christ is NOT the end.

God is "making all things new!" AMEN!

//Will you practice resurrection with me...let's prepare for this Holy Meal...and as we partake, solidify our memories of what this Meal is about...that because of Jesus Christ we are able to rise into new life with more promise and joy than we dare to dream. We've got to keep practicing resurrection.

Will you please turn to page 881 at the back of your hymnal and let's begin by declaring our faith in the words of the Apostle's Creed.